



FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE IN EMILY BRONTE'S NOVEL: WUTHERING HEIGHTS

Ruptalin Engtipi

Research Scholar, Department of English, Assam University Diphu Campus Karbi Anglong, Assam.

ABSTRACT

Wuthering Heights is a remarkable saga of love and revenge, centered on the passionate character of Heathcliff. Being set in the Victorian era Wuthering Heights comprise of some elements of the Victorian society. The Victorian women were so fragile that they are always seen as a mere being that has confined within some expected rules or norms of the society. They neither have the rights to raise their voice against the ill treatment done by the patriarchal society nor are they being treated well. The women were always victimized and dominated by the patriarchal hegemony.

In this context female characters in Wuthering Heights viz Catherine, Isabella, Cathy and Nelly were also victimized by the male hegemony. The female character though being victimized they do have some faulty according to the norms of the Victorian society. Hence, the female characters in the novel are not confirming the Victorian women flocks, but rather they are seen as reacting against the norms of gender.

KEYWORDS: Victorian age; women; patriarchal; male hegemony; gender.

INTRODUCTION:

Emily Bronte, in her novel does not attempt to picture the Victorian life and society. We find that the life at Wuthering heights and at Thrushcross Grange is not typical of the Victorian life. The social settings and the social norms were that of the Victorian age but the characters inhabiting in the novel are not essentially Victorian men and women, instead she portrays two contrary aspects of human nature. And therefore the female character in this respect does not embody the Victorian women life but they are seen as rather reacting against the norms of gender.

The way women are portrayed in Victorian novels clearly raises questions about the search of identity. Indeed they are all faced with the same issue; their position in society, the way they react to it and what comes from it. The Victorian believed that both man and woman were fundamentally different; men were said to be as physically strong and morally weak, whereas woman were seen as being the exact opposite and invested with responsibility to maintain the entire family's moral rectitude. The quality of womanhood according to historian Barbara Welter, included "piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity". In Victorian era women were seen as belonging to the domestic sphere, the rights of women were extremely limited in this era, losing ownership of wages, all of their physical property, including land property.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS:

The in-depth analysis of Catherine Earnshaw, the principal heroine of the novella give us the impact that she does not represent the Victorian women character but she is rather projected as a contrast to those women, she is strong, willed and bold in nature. She is 'a wild, wicked slip with bonniest eye, the sweetest smile and the lightest foot in the parish' (49). Catherine has a peculiar temperament, she is constantly at odds with her father and Nelly's affection is tinged with irritation, 'she put all of us past our patience fifty times and oftener in a day' (49). Cathy was more 'tamed' when she came back from her five week stay at Thrushcross – Grange. Here we see that Catherine is influenced by the social status of the Lintons. Nelly confesses, 'I did not like her, after her infancy was past' (79).

Her true nature is wild and rough and passionate but in the face of the invariable courtesy she experiences at the Grange, she conceals her true nature, and adopts a double character. The most important role of the Victorian women were that of a wife and a mother, Catherine fails at both; she does not love her husband, Edgar Linton, but instead yearns for Heathcliff. Her own nature defeats her, and inevitably her marriage to Edgar Linton leads to discord with the return of Heathcliff. Catherine's character is shown as selfish and loses her spontaneous wildness. She punishes her body for self inflicted anguish of her mind. Catherine cannot reconcile herself to Edgar's calm insipidity. She wants to react with passion to her own passionate fury. She is morally wrong in having chosen to marry Edgar Linton.

Isabella Linton, a typical character in the novel also exhibit as a victim. She has the same weak and colorless goodness of her family. She resembles her brother physically but is less inhibited than he and enlivened by some spark of spirit. Nelly describes her as a 'charming young lady... infantile in manners, though possessed of a keen wit, keen feelings, and a keen temper, too, if irritated.' (123). Isabella is being brought up in a wealthy family, 'like an only daughter, whom everyone was ready to serve' (123). Her entire life was control by the male counterpart; from her childhood her father took control, and after her father's death,

Edgar took control over her life.

Isabella because of her weak and spoiled pampered nature is attracted by Heathcliff's strong, ruthless personality. Catherine Earnshaw loves Heathcliff knowing his true nature- his cruelty but Isabella is taken by his outward gentlemanly and strong personality. However her elopement with Heathcliff exhibits some courage in her which shows that she still have some wish of her own. But when she discovers Heathcliff's true nature, her lately dream of a happily married life vanished in the bloom. For this decision of her, she made to pay dearly as she becomes a victim of Heathcliff's rage and anger. He treats her bitterly like a slave; she says that, 'he is ingenious and unrelenting in seeking to gain my abhorrence! I sometimes wonder at him with an intensity that deadens my fear, yet, I assure you, a tiger or a venomous serpent could not rouse terror in me equal to that which he awakens' (179).

Heathcliff's cruel treatment towards Isabella represents the conditions of the Victorian women life. But her condition was worse than that, she wrote in her letter to Nelly asking, 'is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?' (168). However she exhibits some spirit and courage and engage in a bitter repartee with Heathcliff. She is seen as remarkable for the women of that period, as she does not restraints more and protests her ill treatment by fleeing away from the Heights, which resemble cruel, dark and devil's dwelling. The Victorian women were submissive and endure all the pain they suffer. They were not allowed to give a divorce to their husband and they cannot flee from their marriage. Isabella does not confirm to this law, and however her condition was worst she shows some strength in fleeing away from their unhappy marriage.

We are introduced to Nelly as the housekeeper in Thrushcross Grange. Through her story we see Nelly emerging as a kind and benevolent, dutiful and loyal housekeeper who has no interest apart from the interests of the family she serves. She is the only female character who stood or rather confirm to the Victorian women. She becomes a motherly figure to all the motherless children, such as Hareton and Cathy. As Nelly is the narrator, we truly depend on her presentation of the story, so in other hand there is a chance that she herself might have looked upon herself according to the norms of the Victorian age.

The young Cathy whose birth brings about her mother's death holds an important place in the second half of the fiction. She has the same stubbornness inherited from her mother. Victorian female flocks were not allowed to do as they wished; they are bound within one confinement, their home. But in Cathy we see that she disobeyed her father's wishes of visiting the Heights and soon becomes a victim of Heathcliff's cruelty. Cathy's character does not project that of a submissive women but fights against the superior for her rights. She even challenges Heathcliff and bites his hands to escape from his cruelty. Cathy rebels against what is being wrong. In spite of her great spirit Cathy was unable to come out of the devil's clutch. She only managed to be free and more successful because they all died one by one.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION:

Feminism refers to the issue related with identity, equality and 'othering'. From the following analysis it can be concluded that female characters in the novel were subdued and they were ill treated but the female character too has the tendency to fight against the male dominance. The following female character does

not embody the Victorian women flocks and does not play according to the Victorian society. The following female characters of Wuthering Heights; Catherine, Isabella, Nelly, Cathy have symbolic significance. Though they become the victim of their male counterparts they still has the resistance to fight against the injustice. Except of Nelly there are some faulty against the female character, this according to the Victorian age is a 'taboo'. The female character is contrasted with that of the Victorian women flock so to analyze their status. Their sufferings shows the condition of the Victorian women who is being oppressed, tortured but their character does not confirm to the Victorian age.

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